

opinion

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EDITORIAL

Police must take stalking seriously

The tragic case of Ms. Saya Suzuki highlights an urgent need for the Metropolitan Police Department to overhaul how it handles stalking cases. Despite having gone to the police last week to request that they take action against a man who had been harassing her, Ms. Suzuki, an 18-year-old high school student, was stabbed around 5 p.m. Tuesday in front of her house in Mitaka, Tokyo, and later died. The police arrested a suspect, 21-year-old Charles Thomas Ikenaga, shortly after the stabbing on a street near the crime scene. He reportedly told the police, “I waited for her near her home with the intent to kill her.” The girl had first contacted the Suginami and Mitaka police stations on Oct. 4, telling them that she was being stalked by Mr. Ikenaga. The police tried to call the man three times on his cellphone to issue a warning but took no further action other than to leave a message for him to contact them on his phone when he did not answer. It seems that the police learned nothing from past murders committed by stalkers in Zushi, Kanagawa Prefecture, and Saikai, Nagasaki Prefecture. The Metropolitan Police Department must strictly scrutinize the police’s handling of the case and overhaul procedures to prevent such tragedies in the future. Mr. Ikenaga first made contact with Ms. Suzuki, a budding actress, on Facebook and they exchanged contact information. But eventually he began harassing her via e-mails and letters and she cut off communications. Because she saw Mr. Ikenaga near her house on Oct. 1 and then on the morning of Oct. 4, she called the Suginami police station near her school that afternoon to complain.

Preparing for the 2020 Olympics

The government is pushing a plan to establish a Sports Agency in preparation for the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics to be hosted by Tokyo. It is understandable that the government is eager to help nurture athletes with the potential for remarkable achievements in the Olympics and Paralympics. But it should not forget the importance of strengthening the foundation of sports overall across the country and of improving the health of the general population. When Tokyo was granted the right to host the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, the education ministry announced a goal of winning 70 to 80 Olympic medals including 25 to 30 gold medals. This is an extremely ambitious goal given that Japan won 38 medals in the 2012 London Olympics, including seven gold medals. The government should refrain from gauging the success of the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics in terms of the number of medals Japanese athletes win. They should remember that sports have the power to move people irrespective of who wins. There are signs that the education ministry may provide more support to athletes for competition in which Japan has a higher chance of winning a medal. Because such a policy could weaken the overall foundation of sports in Japan, it should be avoided. The government should not forget the Japanese public’s immense

She reportedly also told her teachers on Oct. 4 and 7 that she was frightened because he was stalking her and had threatened to kill her. One teacher contacted a nearby police station and the case was referred to the police station in Mitaka, where Ms. Suzuki lived. The Suginami police officer who received her phone call on Oct. 4 also told her to immediately contact the Mitaka police station, but he failed to log the meeting or call the Mitaka police despite the seriousness of the situation. Ms. Suzuki and her mother visited the Mitaka police station on Tuesday and explained the man’s bizarre behavior, including an e-mail he had sent in which he stated that he would die if she did not send him her photo. At that point the Mitaka police tried to call him. A Mitaka police officer called the girl on her cellphone around 4:30 p.m. the same day to confirm her safety. About 20 minutes after she answered that she had arrived home, she was stabbed. Given the grave nature of the threats that Mr. Ikenaga had made to Ms. Suzuki, the police must realize that their decision to call him was wrong given the strong possibility that he could become angered by her involving the police and go after Ms. Suzuki. Instead they should have taken actions to protect her and sought to take Mr. Ikenaga into custody. In the future, the police must take stalking cases far more seriously than they did this time. There is one more lesson that should be drawn from this case, and that is that people must be very careful about giving out their contact information to “friends” that they do not personally know on social networks.

interest in the London Games despite Japan’s seven gold medals. If a Sports Agency is established, it should provide sufficient support to disabled athletes as well as able-bodied ones. The government should also strive to make Japan an easier place for disabled people to live. Making public facilities and transportation barrier-free will be among its most important tasks. The basic law on sports, which went into force in 2011, stresses the importance of the revitalization of local communities through sports and the establishment of a culture in which sports play an important role. The government should write a detailed plan on realizing the goals of the basic law so that local governments and citizens can make efforts in this direction. When the Tokyo Games are held in 2020, slightly less than 30 percent of Japan’s total population will have passed the age of 65. The 2020 Games will provide the government with an excellent opportunity to promote ways in which senior citizens can live healthier lives. The central and local governments, schools and sports associations should take steps to eradicate the use of violence in sports training. While there is unfortunately a tradition of using such brutal methods in Japan, they do not improve athletes’ performances and have no place in a modern society.

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Obama’s blatant protectionism

KYODO

It is regrettable that U.S. President Barack Obama declined to veto an import ban on some Samsung Electronics smartphones and tablet computers, thus making Apple the winner in a much-publicized patent-infringement case. In August, the U.S. president, however, overturned a ban ordered by the U.S. International Trade Commission on sales of some older iPhones and iPads on grounds that Apple infringed on a Samsung patent. The U.S. trade representative argued that the two cases differed — the earlier case against Apple involved Samsung’s so-called standard-essential patents, which can be applied to technologies used by all players in the industry. But Apple’s case against Samsung hinged on exclusive design patents. Washington’s explanations cannot

fully explain why Obama exercised his veto power against a trade ban for the first time in 25 years to protect American consumer interests. He cannot avoid criticism that he used his authority to protect a U.S. company and discriminated against a foreign rival. The import ban applies mostly to older Samsung models and therefore should not deal a heavy blow to the world’s largest mobile phone manufacturer. But it cements the widespread notion that Apple is a smartphone technology creator, and Samsung is a copycat. What’s more worrisome are the ominous signs of a protectionist trade posture in Washington. The United States has so far led an international trend in intellectual property rights through litigation and penalties. It has argued strongly for beefed-up intellectual property rights from the members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Yet the Obama administration acted differently in the patent dispute between Apple and Samsung. In view of balancing international trade issues and America’s global status, Obama should not have overturned the earlier ban against Apple products. The power of a veto against an ITC ruling should have been reserved for a serious threat to U.S. consumer interests, national security or social infrastructure. The act of siding with a domestic company and yet doing the opposite against a foreign rival is blatant protectionism. Samsung Electronics plans to appeal. We will closely watch the episode until the end. The U.S. should act more wisely if it does not want to earn the reputation of discriminating against foreign companies and provoking a trade backlash. **The JoongAng Daily, Seoul (Oct. 11)**

The Yellen difference at the Fed

KYODO

Markets are mostly cheering President Barack Obama’s appointment of Janet Yellen to the second most powerful job in the world for its continuity: The current Federal Reserve vice chairman was present at the creation of Chairman Ben Bernanke’s extraordinary monetary exertions, and the market belief is that she will keep it all going. This may be true, yet it obscures an important distinction between the two that may have consequences down the road. Bernanke is more of an improviser who came to his post-crisis actions by what he considers to be the necessities of the moment. His academic roots are as a monetarist, and he justifies his policy mainly in those terms. He considers his various quantitative easings to be entirely consistent with Milton Friedman’s monetary history of the Great Depression. Yellen is a distinguished academic economist, but she is also an unconstructed Keynesian. She studied under James Tobin, the late Yale economist whose ideas dominated American economic policy from the 1950s through the 1970s. Friedman monetarism was in

part a revolt against the Tobin school, which to oversimplify made unemployment a central focus of monetary policy. In the Tobin-Yellen view, the first task of a central banker is to promote full employment rather than to maintain price stability. This is the intellectual underpinning to keep in mind when you read that Yellen favors “easy money” or is a monetary “dove.” It has consequences that are likely to appear over time after she is confirmed by the Senate. She believes in the wisdom of government to steer the private economy and business cycle. When she testifies before Congress as chairman, you can expect her to support spending “stimulus” for short-term growth but tax increases to reduce deficits in the longer term. Her ascension also means the revival of the Phillips Curve, and its academic cousin, NAIRU, or the nonaccelerating inflation rate of unemployment. These nostrums hold that there is a tradeoff between inflation and unemployment: that you can have rapid growth or low inflation, but you can’t have both at once for any length of time. Thus the Fed must constantly be fine-tuning Fed policy to manipulate the business cycle.

All of this is likely to lead Yellen to continue to use Fed policy to try to push the jobless rate much lower, and perhaps for a longer period of time. In 1995 she said during a debate on inflation targeting that “when the goals conflict and it comes to calling for tough tradeoffs, to me, a wise and humane policy is occasionally to let inflation rise even when inflation is running above target.” This helps to explain why, even in the Bernanke era, Yellen has often pushed behind the scenes for even more aggressive bond purchases. The test of a Fed chairman is whether she has the fortitude to tighten money when required even if the politicians and Wall Street are saying it’s still premature. Bernanke must feel at least some frustration that someone else will be responsible for completing his post-panic monetary experiment. Having failed to start tapering bond purchases in September, his window for doing so may be shut as power and deference flow to his successor. Our view of the Bernanke era (since February 2006) is that he contributed greatly to creating the bubble and panic, then acted admirably and creatively to stem the crisis. **The Wall Street Journal (Oct. 10)**

Stephan Richter
Washington

A big hoax of American history is that the Civil War ended in 1865. Unfortunately it has not ended yet. What was achieved then was more of an armistice. As the current logjam in the U.S. Congress makes plain, the Civil War is still present in today’s America — and with virulence that most other civilized nations find as breathtaking as it is irresponsible. Plenty of U.S. commentators are trying to make light of the current situation. They argue that it is just a bunch of tea party Republicans who are causing the current mayhem. Such an interpretation underestimates the forces of history and the continuing deep divisions of American society.

The reason why the Civil War was declared finished was the military defeat of the South. But can anyone seriously doubt that, culturally, the same anti-Union spirit is still heard in the halls of the U.S. Congress today? The fight against the Affordable Health Care Act — which Republicans have labeled “Obamacare” — is cast by Republicans as fighting the authoritarian — and, in the words of some conservative commentators, “fascist” — views of the Obama administration and the American “left.” In their eyes, the Republicans are staking out the democratic and libertarian political high ground, all in the defense of “freedom.” This underscores that what is going on in Washington today is a replay of the Kulturkampf of 1870s Germany. That country’s modernizing forces resolved to fight back against the economically retarding influence of conservative religious forces, mainly the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church of mid-19th-century Germany, a very powerful economic force, resisted any suggestions of modernizing the social structures of society — just as many Republicans do now. It sought to preserve the economic power of the well established, largely feudal-era interests, much as Republicans do now. The fight in Washington thus is not about any of the things in the headlines, the budget, debt or Obamacare. These are proxies in a fundamental battle over the structure of American society.

TED RALL

New York

Last week I spent six hours shopping for Obamacare on New York State’s health care marketplace website. Officials had estimated that it would take the average person seven minutes. Either because I am not an average person or because the Obamacare people are idiots, I spent six hours setting up an account. You can’t log in without an account. There were many questions. The site ran painfully slowly. But I slogged through. Until I ran into a wall. This happened when the system tried to “verify my identity” by asking me to answer a set of multiple-choice questions generated by the DMV (which model car, if any, had I recently purchased?) and some credit reporting agency (which type of loan, if any, was mine?). The page froze. Apple’s little blue circle spun and spun. I wound up with a cryptic error message written by some Indian coder. So I gave up. But then, over the weekend, President Obama spoke soothing words. “What’s happened is the website got overwhelmed by the volume,” Obama said, calmly. And he’s right. That must be what happened. Apparently this explanation was supposed to make it OK. As opposed to prompting another reaction like, say: President Jimmy Carter sent a probe that’s still sending back the sound of interstellar plasma from beyond Pluto, but you can’t rent enough server space to handle Internet traffic? Why? Is the NSA using it all? “Folks,” the president continued, “are working around the clock and have been systematically reducing the wait times, but we are confident that over the course of the six months — because it’s important to remember people have six months to sign up — that we are going to probably exceed what anybody expected in terms of the amount of interest that people have.” Well, if folks are working on it — good, decent, common salt-of-the-earth types, farmer-type hillbilly folks, but with mad coding skills, presumably — then clearly all would be well. And so it was! Since I am uninsured, I spent the weekend avoiding injuries and infections. When I went back to the site on Monday, I was able to log on. Somehow, despite the error message, my account worked. Yay, Folks! Take that, John Boehner! Government can do stuff. First step: you enter the names, Social Security Numbers (SSN) and birthdates of all the members of your family, describe how they’re related, and answer several



arcane questions (are you Native American? Hispanic/Latino? Are you a native-born American or were you naturalized? Have you been here since 1996?). It’s time-consuming but straightforward if you’re used to filling out forms. If you’re like me, and you have a suffix (Sr., Jr., III, IV, V) in your name, the website does not know what to do. It kind of explodes. Until it works. Even though you did the same thing over and over. But then ... it came! The nefarious Return of the Error Messages. What do you mean, you can’t confirm my SSN? I know my SSN. I’ve had it since the Ford administration. I know how to enter it, too. And why are you saying the same thing three times? I kept reentering the same SSN. Same result each time. But then, suddenly, there was hope: I have a right to appeal! So I called the number. Which didn’t answer. How could Obama’s Folks let me down?

For this 50-year-old nonsmoker, New York’s health care plans range from Fidelis Care’s ‘Bronze’ plan at \$810.84 per month (with a \$3,000 deductible) to \$2554.71 per month.

Folks don’t do that. Folks do folks things. Folks suck. What to do? Well, I’m male. So I did what guys do when faced with any insurmountable obstacle: I smashed into it, head first, over and over and over in the hope that something, somehow, for no reason, would change. I reentered all my info. Got the same error about my SSN. Again. Repeat. Rinse. Something. Finally something changed. “Congratulations! You are eligible to enroll in a qualified plan through the Marketplace.” Indeed, I felt like I’d just won a MacArthur fellowship. Which I deserve, because only a genius could have made it this far into such a balky website. It was time to Find a Plan. What did I need to know? A list of my current doctors and of nearby hospitals and health care facilities. No problem. Next, you get a Yelp-like interface you can use to narrow down the various plans to suit your specifications. Among the criteria: Metal Level. Which surprised me, since I didn’t know my knowledge of 1980s hair bands would come in handy. Those who are about to rock, we insure you! A list of plans scrolled down: 54 of them. Talk about sticker shock. NOT affordable. Not, as Obama said, lower than your cellphone bill. For this 50-year-old nonsmoker, New York State’s health care plans range from Fidelis Care’s “Bronze” plan at \$810.84 per month to \$2554.71 per month. I didn’t bother to look up the \$2554.71 one because if I had \$2554.71 a month lying around, I’d

Act 100 years later. The equivalent of politically and economically freeing the slaves back then is now granting health care to all Americans. The old order is about to be toppled and that leads Southerners and white conservatives everywhere to fear for the end of the United States, as they know it. Now the South is once again rebelling against modernizing shifts of American society. In one of the great political realignments of modern politics, that region is the power base of Republicans. Look at the list of state governors who refused to expand the medical program for low-income people (Medicaid) and compare that to the list of states that fought to preserve slavery. There is an amazing overlap. Of the 11 states of the former Confederacy, only Arkansas has agreed to accept federal funds to expand Medicaid. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia have all refused, or are leaning in that direction. One final irony should be pointed out in the historic context: It would be a great injustice to conservatives anywhere on the planet to agree with U.S. Republicans that opposing health insurance coverage for the entire population is “conservative” in any sense of the word. One of the world’s greatest arch-conservatives, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, introduced health coverage for all Germans as far back as 1883. What is it about U.S. conservatives that, by 2013 — 130 years after Bismarck — they cannot muster the same degree of enlightenment as Bismarck? The present state of affairs runs counter to America’s global ideology. According to its self-promotion, the U.S. casts itself as the modernizing vanguard of humanity. In light of what’s going on in Washington today, it is evident that close to half of the U.S. Congress wants an America that is more conservative than Bismarck’s 1880s Germany.

Stephan Richter is publisher and editor in chief of The Globalist, where this article originally appeared.
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Crashes, sticker shock mark Obamacare shopping

buy a doctor. \$810.84 per month. \$10,000 a year. After taxes. Where I live, you have to earn \$15,000 to keep \$10,000. Not affordable. Did I mention that? The plans offered by New York State do not allow you to go “out of network” for health care. In other words, you have to use a doctor in each private insurer’s list, or they don’t pay a cent of reimbursement. Even worse, the plan “deductibles” — the amount you pay out of pocket each year before you the insurer has to cover you for anything at all — are outrageously high. Fidelis Care Bronze has a \$3,000/year deductible per person. I’m in pretty good health; it’s a rare year I spend that much on doctors. This is what used to be known as a catastrophic plan: OK if you get hit by a bus but useless for most people living typical lives. After the \$3,000/year deductible, Fidelis would pay 50 percent of your bills. So if you

rack up \$5,000/year in medical bills, you pay \$4,000 and they pay \$1,000. Crappy. But — and here’s the big Catch-22 — there’s no way to find out whether your doctor, or your local hospital, or clinic — is on a plan list because the site’s primitive search function is “disabled” “due to overwhelming response.” That was that. Obamacare is a bust, at least in New York. Even if I was a millionaire, there’s no way I’m buying anything blind. You don’t buy health care unless you know whether your doctor or local hospital is covered. But what about the famous “subsidies”? If you earn less than four times the federal poverty rate, you’re supposedly eligible for a tax credit that mitigates the outrageous cost of paying crazy high CEO salaries (average \$11 million, the highest of any industry in the U.S.) for for-profit insurers. Applying for financial aid through the site was an ordeal. As a self-employed person, the worst part was having to recreate three months of detailed financial statements from pay stubs. The truth is, I have no idea how much I’ll earn next year. But they don’t care. This system is so not working for me. (I won’t get into the fact that New York’s website assumes it’s already 2014. Another easily avoidable “glitch,” apparently.) It took me a few hours to enter my financial data. But then, finally, thank God, I was done. I pushed “enter.” And got another error message. See you next week.

Ted Rall is a political cartoonist and writer.
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